

Analysis: "Rip Van Winkle"

Learning Goals:

Students will demonstrate their understanding of:

- the distinctive features of American literary periods, particularly the Romantic Period;
- the world climate which precipitated the American Romantic Period;
- how the Romanticism impacted American literature;
- the Romantic American Hero archetype;
- how to interpret "Rip Van Winkle" as an allegory representing American history;
- how to interpret the roles of characters in allegory;
- how framing works in a story;
- how introductory paragraphs of stories can establish mood, help readers predict;
- how "Rip Van Winkle" exemplifies American Romantic Literature;
- how strong imagery creates vivid settings;
- how imagery develops meaning;
- how we can use "Rip Van Winkle" to help us comprehend the behaviors of subjects/citizens the context of the American Revolution;
- how these human behaviors manifest themselves today, the relevance of "Rip Van Winkle" in our culture today;
- how to participate in a successful Socratic discussion.

Before you read the story:

- review the handout on "Close Reading";

Immediately after you read the story:

- develop 5 level two, and 3 level three questions.

Vocabulary: "Rip Van Winkle" is rich with vocabulary. While reading it, you will come across many words unfamiliar to you; some are archaic. Keep this guide handy, and note how the words are used in the story. They should appear as in the order below.

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| 1. chivalrous – marked by honor | 11. dapper – neat in appearance | 20. visage – appearance |
| 2. obsequious-subservient | 12. approbation – approval | 21. melancholy – depression |
| 3. malleable – adaptable | 13. termagant – nagging | 22. desisted – stopped |
| 4. impunity – exempt from punishment | 14. virago – bad tempered woman | 23. reiterated – repeated |
| 5. assiduity – diligence | 15. reciprocated – returned | 24. flagons– large drinking vessels |
| 6. pestilent – troublesome | 16. skulked – moved in a sneaky way | 25. metamorphosed – transformed |
| 7. patrimonial – inherited from father | 17. alacrity – cheerful readiness | 26. Babylonish jargon– confused speech |
| 8. adherent – follower | 18. transient – momentary, fleeting | 27. ditto – copy |
| 9. galligaskins – loose baggy trousers | 19. jerkin-sleeveless jacket | 28. cronies – buddies |
| 10. rubicund – reddish | | |

1. Reread the first three paragraphs. Pretend you are a film director. How would you film the opening settings?
2. Discuss: "Every change of season, every change weather, indeed every hour of the day, produces some change in the magical hues and shapes of these mountains, and they are regarded by all the good wives, far and near, as perfect barometers." Discuss the effects of the repetition of the words "every" and "change."
3. Discuss the use of "noble," "lording," "crown of glory," "magical" and "fairy" in description of the setting. How do the descriptive words in the introductory paragraphs prepare readers for the story?
4. How can a termagant wife be considered a "tolerable blessing"?
5. How does Rip's "meekness of spirit" gain him popularity?
6. Why do the children follow Rip?
7. Discuss the significance: "This, however, always provoked a fresh *volley* from his wife; so he was fain (obliged) to draw off his *forces*..." Explain the motif.
8. Discuss the significance of the "rubicund" portrait of George III. What is the connotative meaning of "rubicund"?
9. Describe Irving's view of marriage. Support your interpretation with lines from the story.
10. Discuss the use of the words: "perpetual," "sleepy," "lazy," "listlessly." How do they help create meaning in the story?
11. Discuss the use of descriptive words and figurative language in the following passage: "He saw at a distance the *lordly* Hudson, far, far below him, moving on its *silent* but *majestic* course, with the reflection of the *purple* cloud, or the sail of a *lagging* bark, here and there *sleeping* on its *glassy* bosom, and at last losing itself in the *blue* highlands."
12. Describe the encounter with the little man and the game of nine pins. Why do you think Irving spends so much time describing them? Why does Rip feel that they are the most "melancholy party of pleasure he had ever witnessed"?
13. Discuss the description of the "amphitheater" before Rip falls asleep. Compare it to the description after he awakens. What is the significance?
14. Discuss the meaning of the changes at the village inn. In what ways does the behavior of the patrons change? What inspired the changes? What does this convey about human nature? Provide an example of this theme from your own experience.
15. Studies of folk tales from around the world have revealed many common narrative elements. Included are: 1. the perilous journey 2. the use of the supernatural 3. disguise and recognition scenes 4. the return of the hero with a boon: something society needs, a spiritual awakening, victory in battle, or the knowledge of having done something great. Next year in English 11, you will study Homer's *Odyssey* in which the hero experiences a journey that also lasts twenty years and includes the narrative elements listed above. Even though Rip's journey is hardly a heroic expedition like that of Odysseus to the Trojan War, he is a hero nonetheless. Do you agree? Comment.

16. Remember that characters in allegories usually are symbolic. For example, at the beginning of the story, Rip Van Winkle represents the complacent American at the time of the Revolution because he acquiesces to his wife. What does she represent? Relate elements of the story to American society, history and spirit surrounding the Revolutionary War. How do the changes in Rip after his lengthy slumber relate to the changes in America after the war? Support your answers with textual evidence.
17. Common attitudes and tendencies of American Romantic Literature include: 1. a distrust of civilization; 2. nostalgia for the past; 3. concern for individual freedom; 4. love for the beauty of the natural landscape; 5. interest in the supernatural. Find lines from the story to support each attitude or tendency.
18. Romantic heroes generally are: 6. childlike; 7. innocent; 8. distrustful of women; 9. fond of nature; 10. in search of a higher truth. Find lines from the story to describe each character trait.
19. Why does the author frame the story? How must we willingly “suspend our disbelief”?